

# Michigan's AmeriCorps Newsletter

## Summer 2009

### 2009: The Best AmeriCorps Week Ever!

The 2009 AmeriCorps Week, which took place May 9-16, has been deemed the best AmeriCorps Week in history as thousands of individuals participated in events throughout the country. AmeriCorps members were recognized through news articles and other media outlets while multiple Governors and state legislatures officially declared the week across the U.S.

Members and alums celebrated AmeriCorps Week by doing what they do best – service! Projects varied from community beautification to food drives and everything in between. Members also took the time to thank their community partners and recruit more Americans into service. Millions of Americans learned about AmeriCorps through school

presentations, recruitment fairs, service projects, and media coverage during the week.



### In This Issue:

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 2009: The Best AmeriCorps Week Ever!      | 6 Michigan Primary Care Association |
| 1 Michigan Campus Compact                   | 6 Michigan AmeriCorps Partnership   |
| 2 2009 Russ Mawby Signature Service Project | 7 Community HealthCorps             |
| 3 Camp Fire USA                             | 7 Char-Em ISD                       |
| 3 City-Year Detroit                         | 8 Volunteer Muskegon's AmeriCorps   |
| 4 4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative            | 8 Downriver CARES                   |
| 4 Superior AmeriCorps                       | 9 Together We Prepare               |
| 5 Huron Pines AmeriCorps                    | 9 the readetroit corps              |
| 5 Faith in Youth Partnership                | 10 Contact Information              |
|   | 10 MI AmeriCorps Member Council     |

### Michigan Campus Compact

#### Author: Bridget Ferrigan

During the Michigan Nonprofit Association's 2009 SuperConference in Dearborn, attendees were invited to celebrate AmeriCorps Week by participating in an onsite service project coordinated by the Michigan Community Service Commission (MCSC). Conference attendees were encouraged to stop by and help cut and tie fleece blankets, which

were then donated to the Wayne County Department of Human Services to be given to youth being placed into foster care.

The service project was a fantastic success! Representatives from the Michigan's AmeriCorps Member Council and MCSC were on hand to help over 60 conference participants and exhibitors make 50 fleece blankets—including an impromptu blanket-making contest

the second day of the conference. We definitely got things done for Michigan (and America!) at the MNA SuperConference.





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### 2009 Russ Mawby Signature Service Project

*AmeriCorps and other volunteers help clean up Flint!*

Each year AmeriCorps members from across Michigan join together for two days of training, teambuilding, and service. On May 15-16, Michigan's AmeriCorps State, National, VISTA, and NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) members gathered to help restore Flint's Grand Traverse neighborhood as part of the 2009 Russ Mawby Signature Service Project. By the end of the second day, several projects were completed, visibly demonstrating the power of Michigan's AmeriCorps members in action.

The Signature Service Project also served as an official closing event for this year's National AmeriCorps Week. During the project, more than 300 participants including AmeriCorps members, alums, and community volunteers contributed more than 3,300 hours of service to the Flint community. Their achievements included the following:

- Installed a large play structure and two picnic tables, painted a storage building, and completed landscaping and planting at Memorial Park.
- Filled nearly 1,700 bags with trash and/or yard waste.
- Removed more than 200 heavy items, including carpet, tires and car parts from various locations

throughout the neighborhood.

- Completed two deck floors, three sheds and two fences at current Habitat for Humanity sites.
- Cleared brush and garbage from a vacant lot to prepare for a future Habitat for Humanity build.
- Disposed of all brush, debris and trash from the area around the city's vacant Oak School.
- Removed graffiti, planted flowers and performed general cleanup at Flint's Riverbank Park.
- Created a community garden at Spring Grove (a site that previously contained 250 tons of trash).





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## Summer 2009

### Camp Fire USA AmeriCorps

**Author: Rachel Cush**

Camp Fire USA's AmeriCorps team got into the spirit of AmeriCorps Week by participating in small service projects to gear up for the statewide 2009 Signature Service Project in Flint. Members attended a West Michigan Strategic Alliance's State of the Region address, and were able to network and spread the word about the recent passage of the Serve America Act. Members provided a "face" for local national service programs while sharing AmeriCorps accomplishments and success stories.

AmeriCorps members also set up a booth at the West Michigan Veteran Job Fair where they did outreach to more than 3,000 people. Participants were extremely receptive and excited to learn about the opportunity to continue providing service to their country.

Rounding out the week, eight members made the trek to Flint to help renovate the city's Grand Traverse neighborhood. Each year, the Signature Service Project is consistently deemed the members' favorite event throughout an entire year of service. It was remarkable

to see the tangible metamorphosis take place at the individual sites located all over downtown Flint. The most memorable moments came from being able to meet some of the families that were directly affected by the progress being made.



### City Year Detroit

**Author: Asa Lockett**

I joined City Year knowing I would change the lives of youth, but didn't fully understand what that meant until I met Gregory. Gregory is a seventh grader who has always been shy and secluded from those around him. When I first met him, it was difficult to get him to open up. My first task was to build trust, so I worked with Gregory almost every day helping him with class assignments, homework, and talking about sports. Throughout the school year, Gregory slowly came out of his shell and began to participate in numerous activities. He even came out to serve with us at his school on several occasions.

One of these service projects was held during the 2009 AmeriCorps Week. I served as a program coordinator and periodically checked all of our stations to make sure our AmeriCorps members and volunteers were on task. Every time I came around to Gregory's station, he just smiled back at me while working his hardest to remove graffiti from the school's walls. As other students walked from class to class they seemed to be inspired by Gregory's spirit. After their classes ended, they came one after the other, asking how they could lend a hand.

The entire week went smoothly with the help from other students. After

AmeriCorps Week ended, I sat down with Gregory to tell him how proud I was. He responded by telling me he was proud of City Year and that he wanted to help people like we did when he got older. He didn't realize that he has already begun to do just that. He continued to show a willingness to serve others throughout the remainder of the school year and I look forward to seeing how he will impact others in the future.





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## Summer 2009

### 4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative

**Author: Christine Sisung**

This year's AmeriCorps Week offered a unique opportunity for the members of the 4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative to showcase the great things being done to expand mentoring opportunities in the state. Members held open houses, gave presentations, and participated in service projects across the Michigan.

Barb Brow (Ottawa County Mentoring Collaborative) planned and held an open house to showcase different AmeriCorps programs in West Michigan. Jeff VoVilla (Isabella/Midland Department of Human Services) planned a similar event for programs located in the central area of the state. Rosalind

Vaughn (Catholic Social Services) did two outreach presentations to high school students in Pontiac. Christine Sisung (Clinton County) kept busy promoting national service to human service agencies for a greater understanding of AmeriCorps and its impact on the community.

Several members also planned service projects. Kristi Snyder (Alpena) coordinated a Bike-A-Thon to help a family with an autistic child. Amy VanProoyen (Kids Hope USA) helped run the S.W.A.T service project, which involved making items for soldiers, widows, children in the hospital, and teachers. Garry Carr (Cheboygan County) collected items for the local Humane Society. Members also

worked with site-based mentoring groups in Clinton County on a service-learning project.

The week concluded with participation in the 2009 Signature Service Project held in Flint. AmeriCorps Week was an all around success for 4-H Mentor Michigan Initiative members, from educating others about national service to providing direct service in their communities.



### Superior AmeriCorps

**Author: Yasmine Lennon**

On May 11th, Superior AmeriCorps hosted an informational luncheon for community leaders, including State Representative Mike Lahti. Also present were members of local law enforcement, school administrators, representatives from potential new program sites, and members of the media.

Participants had an opportunity to learn more about national service and hear from various speakers. Site supervisors talked about how members make a difference at their service sites and Corps members shared how their AmeriCorps

service has impacted their life. Other highlights included a slide show of members in action and scrapbook pages for each member, which were covered with information and memories from service projects, trainings, and community involvement.

At the end of the luncheon, participants completed a survey to determine the effectiveness of the presentations. All who participated reported a gain in knowledge. Attendees were then invited to assist with a service project packing activity bags for children, which were then donated to area hospitals. As a result of these events, a local

school administrator applied to have an AmeriCorps member placed in his school system for the first time. Media coverage included an interview on our local radio station, two interviews on the local news, and a story on the front page of the local newspaper about how members serve the community.





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## Summer 2009

### Huron Pines AmeriCorps

**Author: Matt Reaume**

May 9th, 2009 began on a secluded bluff overlooking the black river in Cheboygan County, where members of Huron Pines AmeriCorps joined local volunteers to restore eroding shoreline that for years has impeded the survival of an ancient fish known as sturgeon.

Upon arrival at the project site, I had the privilege of meeting a family of volunteers who welcomed me to their campfire, eager to tell the stories they have accumulated throughout the years participating in this event. It did not take long to understand just how important a role the wildlife has played in their family.

A young man spoke of the river as a companion in his life growing up. It sparked early childhood memories of my own; memories of traveling miles of wilderness along a silent stream with my father, fishing and observing the natural wonders of Michigan. It occurred to me then that this service project was not merely designed to promote a government program and AmeriCorps Week. No, this project was more about sustaining a lifestyle for the people who have depended on Michigan's natural heritage to deliver long lasting satisfaction and meaning in their everyday lives.

More than 60 volunteers placed rock, topsoil, seed, and landscape fabric at two different sites along

the shoreline and planted over 3,000 native plants to reduce erosion. However, it was clear by the end of the project the Huron Pines AmeriCorps members made their difference not in the number of plants they put in the ground, but by the countless memories they worked to create for future generations of northern Michigan families.



### Faith In Youth Partnership

**Author: Rosemarie Villarreal**

The Faith in Youth Partnership began brainstorming ideas of how to create a 2009 AmeriCorps Week event that would have an impact on our community early on. Our goals were to increase public recognition of AmeriCorps and have a presence in the communities we serve. The decision was made and we began planning and preparing a mural/logo for a local shop called Greggor Dogs.

Greggor Dogs is a little hot dog shop in the heart of downtown Holland that stays intentional about community volunteerism and serving youth. During the mural painting,

AmeriCorps members passed out flyers and encouraged everyone they met to come show support for their community and to view our mural. The majority of the mural was painted during the closed hours of the shop, but the AmeriCorps logo was added during the "Grand Re-Opening/AmeriCorps Open House" event.

The community had the opportunity to interact with the AmeriCorps members and learn what national service is all about. It was a great decision to paint the logo on the day of the opening because it gave a visual representation of our involvement in this event. Many people of all ages came to see what

the stir was all about. There was food, laughter, balloons, face-painting, and our AmeriCorps information table. It was a joy to take part in painting a mural that encompasses a new logo symbolizing community and Greggor Dogs' commitment to service.





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## Summer 2009

### Michigan Primary Care Association

**Author: Beth Leonard**

The annual Russ Mawby Signature Service Project provided a great opportunity to serve alongside my fellow Michigan Primary Care Association Community Health Corps members, as well as another 250 AmeriCorps members from across the state. The team I helped lead and motivate was assigned to cleaning up and clearing out vacant lots around Flint's Grand Traverse neighborhood.

One of the many things I have learned and experienced first-hand through AmeriCorps is that difficult projects can be completed in a short amount of time when individuals work together to achieve success. After walking a few blocks to the first lot, we embarked upon a sad sight: a huge old house with its

windows boarded up and front and back yards strewn with trash. As soon as we had shovels, rakes and trash bags, we got to work. No one seemed very enthusiastic at the start, but as soon as the project began to take shape and we saw the number of trash bags piling up at the street, everyone became very motivated to have the yard completely cleaned out and appearing cared for. A neighbor even came out and loaned us a shovel and rake to use! By the time we made it to the second lot, it seemed as if we were in overdrive to finish our service for the day, and finish strong!

I believe to make a real difference solving a community need; it takes all involved to commit to doing their part and making things happen. I saw evidence of this the second day of our service while my group

worked to deconstruct a dilapidated shed at another vacant lot. A mom and her two children who lived two houses down came out and helped us haul every last board and piece of rotting shingle out to the road. Like the previous day, within only a few short hours, an open space in the neighborhood transformed into pleasant surroundings. At service projects with fellow AmeriCorps members, the more hands there are the more efficient and quickly things get done!



### Community HealthCorps

**Author: LaShauna Horton**

Members of the Cherry Street Health Services National Community HealthCorps chose to spend four days of the 2009 AmeriCorps Week promoting AmeriCorps throughout the community. Three presentations were given at area high schools to talk to students about the different programs AmeriCorps offers. Members also created a video to use during the presentations that highlighted the HealthCorps team.

Students had the opportunity to hear personal stories from the AmeriCorps members about why they joined and the positive impact national service has had on their lives. Members hosted information tables with brochures, applications, and stickers at area high schools, Grand Rapids Community College, and Michigan Works. The members raised awareness about national service opportunities, the benefits AmeriCorps provides, and how

others can join. Through the members' efforts, Cherry Street was able to reach 200 community members.







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## Summer 2009

### Michigan AmeriCorps Partnership

**Author: Raymond Murray**

This year's AmeriCorps Week was fun and exciting from start to finish! The Michigan AmeriCorps Partnership program teamed up with Downriver CARES, Jumpstart Michigan, the readetroit corps, City Year, Clear Corps, and a host of volunteers, to get things done in Detroit. We had the opportunity to serve at five different locations on our big day of service!

At Gleaners, members helped sort through many pounds of non-perishable food items, separating the damaged from the usable items. These products would be packaged and delivered to needy children

and families throughout the metro-Detroit area. Members stationed at Capuchin Soup Kitchen created food boxes, sorted and hung clothing, packaged fresh vegetable and fruit bags, and prepared and served a meal to over 150 adults and children.

The Heidelberg Project was exciting because it was my first time seeing the wonderful work of art that stretches across an entire neighborhood on the east side of Detroit. The founder of this project uses everyday, discarded objects to create a two block area full of color, symbolism, and intrigue. Members painted, removed trees, and picked up garbage. Some members helped glue pennies to a house that will

one day be completely covered with them! Other members enjoyed a day of gardening, planting, raking, and weeding to make the world a more beautiful place. Being part of something that has such a huge impact was an amazing experience. In one day we re-shaped five different locations in Detroit – now that's getting things done! I plan to always participate in AmeriCorps Week – even after my term of service has ended.



### Char-Em ISD

**Author: Savanah Zednicsek**

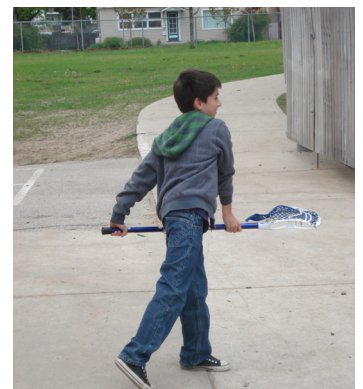
"When I went home I told my parents about the Lacrosse coach and I showed them the card he gave me. I told them how he said I was really good and he wanted me on the team and how much fun I had."

This was the story I heard as I stood in the lobby greeting students entering the school. Carter, a fourth grade student, walked in with a huge smile on his face and new lacrosse sticks in hand. I shared in his excitement and told him how great it was. Carter informed me that he had persuaded the coach to lend him some equipment so he could practice with the team. One week later, I got an invitation to his first lacrosse game.

Carter had never played lacrosse before, but after attending Char-Em ISD's AmeriCorps Week "Spring Into Action" service project, he found a new interest – one he will hopefully carry with him for years to come! AmeriCorps members hosted this free event that promoted physical activity and nutrition. Although he is only in fourth grade, Carter is playing with the sixth grade team because the coach saw a gift in him.

Carter has never been very enthusiastic about school, but there has been a distinct attitude change since the AmeriCorps Week event. He is much happier and is always excited to practice lacrosse during recess. He has also made many new

friends with the attention gained from his skill. This bond, created over a sport, has brightened Carter's life and created something new and exciting for him.





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## Summer 2009

### Volunteer Muskegon's AmeriCorps

**Author: Erica Simpson**

I came to Flint with a little hesitation. You see, I am a “girlie girl,” and the thought of manual labor and getting dirty sends chills down my spine. However, I knew I would be surrounded with other AmeriCorps members who would encourage me through the hopefully not-too-painful process.

As we started our service, my fears began to subside. I realized I was capable of making hundreds of trips with wheel barrels full of mulch—and actually kind of enjoyed it! On one of my many trips, I noticed two little guys from the neighborhood with whom I quickly made friends – Ananias (a.k.a. Peanut) and Julian.

Julian shared that he lived in one of the very first Habitat for Humanity houses ever built in Flint. Soon, Peanut and Julian became part of our team. They were given the smaller wheel barrels and took pride in helping contribute to the cool, new playground! These two boys captured my heart. They gladly pitched in and wanted to serve in any way possible.

Saturday quickly came to an end. As I listened to the speakers thank us for our service, I felt a nudge on my shoulder. Julian's big brown eyes were looking down at me. “I can't find my sweatshirt,” he whispered. This may seem like a small gesture, but Julian's tiny request made my day. We had

connected enough that, out of the hundreds of people there, he searched for me to help him find his missing sweatshirt. After searching, we found the worn out yellow jacket and gave each other one last hug. Most likely, I will never see Julian or Peanut again. I won't watch them mature, grow, or graduate, but the imprint of their smiles and spirits will be with me always.



### Downriver CARES

**Author: Kathleen Grandy**

During AmeriCorps Week, Downriver C.A.R.E.S. participated in two community events. First, our members joined several other southeast Michigan's AmeriCorps programs in honoring Gleaners Community Food Bank, Capuchin Soup Kitchen, and the Heidelberg Project as Outstanding Community Partners. We worked in the garden, cleaned up trash, sorted food, glued pennies to a Heidelberg house, and much more. It was a great chance for the different programs to come together and really make a difference in the community.

The second event took place on May 13th at The Guidance Center's new Community Resource Center (CRC) in River Rouge. Our goal was to spread the news about the CRC and invite the community inside to a comfortable setting. The event was free to the community and included a barbeque, carnival games, a moon walk, face painting, and more. The turnout was great! The children had a fun time and parents received valuable information about the services we offer. The kids especially enjoyed the face painting – all the little boys got a beard and moustaches painted on their face to look like one of the dads who attended the event!

One mother, already familiar with the CRC, came to the carnival and brought several of her neighbors. She previously told them about the CRC, but they had yet to check it out themselves. The carnival provided a perfect opportunity to explore the center and have fun at the same time. Now, many of these attendees regularly utilize the CRC making the carnival a success!







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## Summer 2009

### Together We Prepare (Red Cross)

**Author: Josh Meyers**

Unlike many programs throughout the state of Michigan, the AmeriCorps Together We Prepare Program ventured out of state for the entire duration of the 2009 AmeriCorps Week. Our time in Iowa was spent working on two different projects; we worked on restoring historic Harper's Ferry as well as canvassing local homes that were affected by the Cedar Rapids River Flood that occurred just over a year ago. Many of the areas we canvassed looked as if the water had

just recently receded even though it had long since haunted the streets.

On our first day of canvassing we encountered a row of abandoned homes which would have been uninterrupted if not for a single restored home which sat between two of the worst hit homes. The woman who answered the door was the first person we had seen in over 40 minutes of canvassing. She proceeded to tell us how she and her husband had both been laid off as a result of the flood, but that through the help of AmeriCorps,

the government, and the Red Cross, they had been able to completely restore their home. While we were not able to directly help this woman, we were able to hear her story of resiliency and strength which bolstered my own desire to continue serving at the American Red Cross of Greater Grand Rapids

### the readetroit corps

**Author: Colette Jenkins**

The day started out warm and sunny as hundreds of AmeriCorps members assembled at Gleaner's Food Bank in Detroit. Then I saw a green jacket among a group of gray sweatshirts and I knew instantly it was my readetroit corps members from Communities In Schools. I quickly joined my fellow members who were all smiling and ready to go. We signed in, got name tags, and received our respective assignments.

The Opening Ceremony introduced group leaders and included a motivational speech by Lloyd Jackson, a Commissioner of Michigan Community Service Commissioner. Jackson presented a proclamation from Governor

Jennifer M. Granholm recognizing the 2009 AmeriCorps Week. There was also a Spirit of Detroit Award presented by the Detroit City Council, represented by Councilwoman Monica Conyers.

We then divided into our assigned groups for the day. I had the opportunity to go to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen where we prepared and served food to area residents. This facility serves three meals a day, six days a week. We also volunteered at the Capuchin Medbury facility where we packed boxes with canned goods, other nutritional foods, and dry goods like pasta, rice, and fruit cups. Others helped by folding and hanging clothes on racks.

During lunch, we viewed a video about the Capuchins, who have served Detroit citizens in need since 1929. We also toured the facility, including the "Granny Reading Room," and the computer room for their after-school program. Our guide and volunteer coordinator, Roy, has worked for the facility for 41 years and is an exceptional example of what Capuchin is able to achieve. This was a wonderful opportunity to give back and make an impact on the Detroit community.





# Michigan's AmeriCorps Newsletter

## Summer 2009

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